

In letter to President Obama, Menendez, Lautenberg, Pallone and Holt cite Gulf oil spill as most recent evidence of risk to shorelines

WASHINGTON – Today, New Jersey’s two U.S. Senators and two of the state’s Members of Congress called on the Obama administration to reverse its announced plans to open up the East Coast of the United States to oil drilling. In a letter to President Obama, Senators Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Frank Lautenberg and Reps. Frank Pallone (NJ-6) and Rush Holt (NJ-12) said the current oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is only the latest example of the real risk drilling poses to coastal communities and the economies they support. Under the administration’s plan, drilling along the coast of Virginia could occur within 100 miles of the Jersey Shore and, eventually, drilling along the coast of Delaware could occur within 10 miles of New Jersey.

“In the wake of the tragic accident, loss of life, and pollution in the Gulf of Mexico from the Deepwater Horizon oil rig, we are even more steadfastly opposed to any offshore drilling that could imperil the environment or economy of coastal New Jersey,” wrote the Members of Congress. “While we appreciate the White House’s announcement that no additional offshore drilling will be authorized until a full investigation of the accident is complete, we urge you to go further and reverse your decision on proposed new offshore oil and gas drilling for the outer continental shelf.

“The spill, and the conduct of companies like BP, raises serious concerns about expanding drilling to areas like the Atlantic seaboard. This catastrophe demonstrates exactly why no new drilling should proceed in any U.S. waters, and certainly not in the Atlantic. This incident exposes the many deficiencies in worker safety, blow out avoidance technology, and oil spill clean-up plans for operations in the outer continental shelf. We simply are not prepared to make our pristine Jersey shoreline the next test case for the oil companies’ experiment in how to maximize profits and minimize regulations.” PDF of letter to President Obama: http://menendez.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/20100430ltr_drilling1.pdf

Text of letter:

April 30, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama

The White House

Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

In the wake of the tragic accident, loss of life, and pollution in the Gulf of Mexico from the Deepwater Horizon oil rig, we are even more steadfastly opposed to any offshore drilling that could imperil the environment or economy of coastal New Jersey. While we appreciate the White House's announcement that no additional offshore drilling will be authorized until a full investigation of the accident is complete, we urge you to go further and reverse your decision on proposed new offshore oil and gas drilling for the outer continental shelf.

The spill, and the conduct of companies like BP, raises serious concerns about expanding drilling to areas like the Atlantic seaboard. This catastrophe demonstrates exactly why no new drilling should proceed in any U.S. waters, and certainly not in the Atlantic. This incident exposes the many deficiencies in worker safety, blow out avoidance technology, and oil spill clean-up plans for operations in the outer continental shelf. We simply are not prepared to make our pristine Jersey shoreline the next test case for the oil companies' experiment in how to maximize profits and minimize regulations.

Your announcement on March 31 means that New Jersey faces the prospect of oil drilling within just a few miles from our coastline. We believe that this action threatens New Jersey's beautiful beaches and our substantial fishing and tourism industries with the risk of an oil spill. Our beaches are a tremendous resource and an essential economic engine. They are the centerpiece of tourism and fishing industries that are responsible for hundreds of thousands of jobs and tens of billions of dollars of revenue for our state each year. The New Jersey Shore is also an environmental treasure that serves as a natural habitat for wildlife and deserves to be protected in its own right.

Despite protestations from the industry, oil spills from offshore oil exploration and production happen all too often. On August 21, 2009, an oil rig began leaking off the northern coast of Australia. The rig leaked for over 10 weeks and then caught fire before finally being plugged on November 3, 2009. On April 6, an oil spill occurred 10 miles off the coast of Louisiana that released 18,000 gallons of oil into a nearby wildlife refuge. And as you know, an estimated 210,000 gallons per day of crude oil is currently leaking from the Deepwater Horizon rig into the Gulf and headed toward Louisiana where it may have already made landfall.

The Deepwater Horizon tragedy should bring a halt to any expansion of offshore drilling, including MMS's current decision-making process with regard to seismic testing, revising the 2007 to 2012 5-year plan and scoping for the 2012 to 2017 plan. Therefore we ask that you suspend all action on expanding such exploration on the Outer Continental Shelf immediately and reverse any plans to drill off the Atlantic coast.

Sincerely,

ROBERT MENENDEZ

United States Senator

FRANK R. LAUTENBERG

United States Senator

FRANK PALLONE

Member of Congress

RUSH HOLT

Member of Congress

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